

Chapter 1 – RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATO

The suggested recommendations for NATO from this research Task Group were many and varied. In addition to the carefully written recommendations contained in the chapters members additionally submitted the following recommendations for consideration by NATO policy makers in regard to these topics.

In terms of Science Policy and the following recommendations were given:

- The study of radicalization, terrorism and extremism has only just begun. It would be useful for NATO to engage the academic community to a far greater degree in assessing the problems, their causes, and what can be done about them. At a minimum NATO should sponsor activities that develop descriptive standards for key terms that characterize modern-day conflicts. For instance the term radicalization needs to be properly defined for use within NATO. A critical analysis of existing motivational theories of violent conflict should be conducted. This analysis should examine both the theoretical strengths and weaknesses and also the extent to which empirical evidence confirms or refutes these theories' hypotheses. In essence, this is needed to move terrorism studies in the direction of terrorism science.
- At the same time NATO Nations are all facing issues of radicalization, extremism and terrorism and many are engaged in fighting insurgents in both Iraq and Afghanistan and will be likely involved in other conflicts where terrorism is a key element. Case studies, in depth analyses and lessons learned by engaging programs to prevent, counter and reverse radicalization are all useful and should be shared among Nations. Science occurs on many levels – from the in-depth case study method to the controlled experimental design and all are valuable inputs to understanding these phenomena better. The academic community can play a very important role in supporting these goals and should be fully engaged by NATO.
- Terrorism and radicalization are multi-faceted phenomena and require an interdisciplinary approach to address the problems. Experts with deep expertise in pertinent areas need to be engaged, even those who may not have written anything on terrorism per se. The NATO scientists engaged, at a minimum, need to be able to identify these areas of expertise and forge the links. Advanced Research Workshops are a good mechanism for that.
- In regard to the RTG process members felt that better planning for actual NATO-sponsored research and some level of funding and commitment from the Nations is needed to conduct joint research among the NATO Nations. Ideally an RTG should make plans for collaborative work to be fleshed out early on, including feasibility assessments, and meetings should be opportunities to review research progress, plan next stages, etc., but this requires solid commitments by the Nations involved in and sending representatives to the meetings for: funding support, consistent attendance and commitment to the process and a willingness to share data.
- Since NATO RTGs are, by definition, multi-national teams, they can do research that individual researchers would find impossible to achieve. For example, this group might have devised a public opinion survey, like the Eurobarometer, that has questions designed to test specific hypotheses about support for terrorism in the general public, which would be administered in member countries in their native languages. Right now, we have to rely on limited tests based on incidentally relevant questions posed by researchers in other multi-national projects, like the World Values Survey, Eurobarometer, Afrobarometer, etc. Such efforts should leverage expertise in academia, as well.

In terms of short-term policy measures to actually counter terrorism the following recommendations were given:

- Increase efforts to identify and render harmless potential “radicalisation-entrepreneurs” by either prosecuting them, or guiding them to find more constructive ways to act out their activism. Many of

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATO

the “home-grown” terrorists who resonate to ideological messages of such groups as al Qaeda might benefit from opportunities to take part in a “humanitarian jihad” – something akin to the US sponsored Peace Corps where young passionate people could be sent off to help build countries and address their concerns about injustice, poverty and conflicts in constructive ways rather than get involved in destruction.

- De-legitimization of extremist messages – this requires identifying where such messages are spread from – opinion makers, radical clerics, youth leaders, etc. Finding ways of hampering the proliferation of violent extremist messages on the Internet, maybe through increasing “positive” messages as a counter-balance. Likewise it is possible to de-legitimize militant jihadi messages by using emotionally engaging footage that terrorist groups like to use but pairing it with a different message, one that does not endorse killing civilians and that shows the destruction that terrorist groups are causing.
- Identifying “radical voices” and working to curb them. An important target group is charismatic “gate keepers” such as radical clerics, “jihad veterans” (people who have returned back from Iraq for instance in the Yemen context – and Guantanamo returnees), and leaders in militant milieus who play a vital recruitment role.
- Prevent the establishment of facilities and sanctuaries (empty, negative, secretive meeting places. in which radicals can spread their violent messages, their violent ideology, indoctrinate new members and socialize them into a violent extremist (“jihadist”) worldview. Develop healthy meeting places for discussion, activity and learning – sports, vocational training, languages, media training, etc.
- The development of youth leadership programmes: many of the target group interviews focus on the need for skills and training – vocational training, leadership skills, political management skills, administration skills, i.e., develop “cultures” of positive exchanges and learning centres.

Awareness-raising programmes:

- Many of the target groups focus on the need for places to learn and discuss issues at stake for youth – *meeting places* for discussion, places to “eliminate negative feelings”, have outlets for opinions, media training, key concerns are often seen to be: corrupt leaders, lack of democracy, lack of places to be heard, apathy.
- Awareness campaigns – sending positive messages through media, TV, internet – make youth create the message to be sent out, media training, journalism skills with the goal to create awareness and ownership of their own futures.

Recommendations were also made to design and study resilience to terrorism across multiple NATO Nations, including Partner Nations, in order to learn more about the responses to terrorism and what are the best means to bolster resilience. This RTG made steps in that direction but was unable to conduct a multi-national study with no funding.

Likewise NATO troops continue to be involved in high threat security environments. Many militaries study resilience in these situations for their troops but fail to study their civilian counter-parts who have less training to deal with serving in a high threat environment and who may be far more deeply affected. This group sponsored the beginnings of research in both of these areas but was limited in what could be done without proper funding.

NATO should also sponsor multi-national research looking at how terrorist messages engage vulnerable recruits within NATO Nations and how messages could be tested in small focus groups and also over the Internet to learn if they too could resonate with the same types of individuals while engaging them in constructive, versus violent responses.

Mediterranean Dialogue and Gulf Cooperation countries should also be more deeply engaged in the RTG groups studying terrorism and radicalization as the ideological basis of the militant jihad stems from Arab scholars and activists and these countries have valuable experience in dealing with prison, military and society radicalization and efforts to curb it.

There are many factors involved in disengagement and de-radicalization from extremists and terrorists groups. These issues should be studied across the Nations and experts should be brought together to discuss best practices, cutting edge ideas and experiences with such efforts.

The RTG-140 group had a great deal of expertise among its members. It would be wise to disseminate the findings of the group through a lecture series follow on activity and to reformulate another group, or groups that can study resilience in high threat security environments, where terrorism takes place and that can organize to continue to study radicalizations and efforts to fight terrorism, as well as disengagement and de-radicalization efforts.

